

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Carol Kowalski, Director of Planning & Community Development

**FROM:** Judi Barrett, Project Manager, Arlington Master Plan

**DATE:** June 19, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Progress Report; Public Participation, and "Next Steps"

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Attached please find a discussion document for the next Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC) meeting on June 27, 2013. It contains an overview of the public participation initiatives conducted in May-June 2013, including five days of interviews, an online survey (which is still open for public use), and three major community meetings. In addition, I am providing together an updated project calendar and recommended "next steps" for staff and the MPAC. We are still developing a comprehensive map that captures the ideas residents expressed during breakout sessions at the June 2013 community meetings. I will bring the map with me on Tuesday night.

Kindly distribute this to the MPAC for review. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me at (617) 455-8641 or by email at [jbarrett@rkgassociates.com](mailto:jbarrett@rkgassociates.com).

## **I. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

### **A. Interviews**

In May 2013, RKG conducted group or individual interviews with 51 people referred by Planning and Community Development (PCD) staff. The interviews took place on May 17, May 20-22, and May 29, 2013. Attachment A lists the residents and/or business owners who participated in the interview process. Carol Kowalski, Planning Director, sat in on most or all of the interviews.

For consultants, interviews held early in the timeline of a master plan are an immersion process. We are still in a learning mode, and interviews provide an efficient way to find out more about the community – ideally from people with different backgrounds and experiences and who travel in different social or political circles. In Arlington, our interview protocol consisted of six basic questions (which we sometimes added to depending on the particular group of interviewees):

- What attracts people to Arlington? (Why do people move here? Why do they stay?)
- What issues do you think we are likely to hear about during the master plan process?
- What has changed in Arlington during the time that you've lived in the town?
- What do you hope will come out of the master plan process?
- Given what you know about what's happening around Arlington (in the region), do you see any conditions or circumstances that might have an impact on Arlington's plan? Are there external forces – good or bad – that may need to be accounted for in the master plan?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say about Arlington that our questions didn't give you an opportunity to share? Something important that you think we should know about?

Not surprisingly, some common viewpoints emerged during our five days of interviewing people at Arlington Town Hall. Focusing on the “most common” or “most frequent” ideas from any public process runs the risk of appearing to dismiss ideas that really matter but did not come up often enough to merit special mention. However, we *do* pay attention to in-the-minority perspectives even if we do not cite them in a summary such as this. Often, they inform our research efforts as we begin the task of locating data and other information that will be used in the baseline assessments for each master plan element.

#### **1. What attracts people to Arlington? Why do they stay?**

The interview groups frequently mentioned these qualities of the Town:

- Convenient location (relative to Boston, Cambridge, Rte. 128 employment centers)
- Great schools

- Relatively affordable (relative to other communities nearby)
- Strong sense of civic pride
- Friendly, safe,
- Walkable

**2. What issues do you think we are likely to hear about during the master plan process?**

- Traffic – particularly on Mass. Ave.
- Loss of commercial tax base and excessive dependence on residential taxpayers
- The Mass. Ave. project
- Inadequate parking
- Flooding
- Mugar property
- Divisiveness between “old” and “new” Arlington
- Loss of affordability

**3. What has changed in Arlington during the time that you’ve lived in the town?**

- Restaurants (number and variety)
- No longer a “dry” town
- Bike path
- More diversity: ethnic, racial, faith, household and family types
- More “white collar” today than in the past
- Higher housing prices

**4. What do you hope will come out of the master plan process?**

- A clear, realistic plan for economic growth
- Strategy(ies) to promote tourism
- Solutions to the parking shortage
- Plan to address Arlington’s flooding problems
- Commitment to explore regionalization of services
- Better zoning

**5. Given what you know about what’s happening around Arlington (in the region), do you see any conditions or circumstances that might have an impact on Arlington’s plan? Are there external forces – good or bad – that may need to be accounted for in the master plan?**

- Development along Route 2, Route 128
- Regional transportation improvements, e.g., Green Line extension
- Proposed casino (Everett)
- Regional competition for businesses, e.g., Kendall Square

**6. Is there anything else you'd like to say about Arlington that our questions didn't give you an opportunity to share? Something important that you think we should know about?**

- Town needs to address beautification (gateways, commercial areas)
- Businesses should stay open later (increase night life in Arlington)

For anyone who attended the community meetings, these most-frequent comments from the interviews must sound very familiar. Many of the same ideas topped the list of workshop priorities, too.

**B. Community Meetings**

At the request of the MPAC and Town staff, RKG designed and led community meetings on June 1 (Arlington Center), June 4 (Arlington Heights), and June 5, 2013 (East Arlington). Each meeting consisted of two activities: a large-group discussion of Arlington's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), and a breakout session for residents to work through an assignment in small groups and report their conclusions back to the larger group. We do not have actual attendance counts for these meetings, but we estimate that about 75 residents attended on June 1, 50 residents on June 4, and 85-90 residents on June 5.

We have delivered unedited lists of the SWOT results in a separate Excel workbook. For purposes of this progress report, we cite only the top five "vote-getters," i.e., the ideas that residents thought of as high priorities. The numbers shown in the following tables indicate the number of "votes" participants cast for each idea, using colored dots to express their preferences. After reviewing the SWOT notes and the breakout session maps, we found that overall – and this, too, is no surprise – there is substantial agreement about what makes Arlington appealing to people and not so much agreement about what people would like to see in Arlington's future. This is evident in the online survey results, too.

**1. Arlington's Strengths (Top Five)**

<b>June 1, 2013</b>		<b>June 4, 2013</b>		<b>June 5, 2013</b>	
Natural environment (lakes, ponds, rivers, open space)	18	Library	12	Minuteman Bikeway	29
Strong schools	13	Location (Regional)	11	Schools: neighborhood, modern	26
Public transportation - access and choice	13	Government	10	Walkable and bikeable	24
Strong citizen involvement	12	Neighborhood schools	10	Great library	20
Historical attractions, historical society, and public commitment to preservation	9	Open space	7	Low crime	16

June 1, 2013		June 4, 2013		June 5, 2013	
Population Diversity (age, nationality, income, ethnicity)	9	Bike paths	7		
Library	9	Compact, Walkable	7		
Minuteman Bike Path	8	Center for the arts	6		
		Senior facilities/services / programs	6		

## 2. Arlington's Weaknesses

June 1, 2013		June 4, 2013		June 5, 2013	
Rapidly rising residential tax base	25	Reliance on residential tax base	10	Lack of commercial property	28
Structural deficit	21	Need for better public transit	10	Lack of industrial tax base	28
Lack of attention to aesthetics: storefronts, streetscapes, public spaces	19	No direct access to subway	10	Divisiveness (old v new Arlington)	25
Traffic - particularly in region	18	Discontinuous sidewalks	8	Deferred maintenance of Town infrastructure	23
Sidewalks difficult to maneuver, impediment to walking, wheelchairs, strollers, tree damage	14	Traffic around Alewife	7	Overnight parking ban	23
		Bus service is limited to certain corridors	6	Property taxes & rapidly rising debt	22
		Aging infrastructure	6	Lack of affordable housing	19
		Lack of speeding enforcement	6	High School low rating	19
		Losing trees faster than being replaced (underfunded)	6	Traffic	19
		Parking (limits businesses), esp. Center, E. Arlington	5		

### 3. Potential Opportunities for Arlington's Future

June 1, 2013		June 4, 2013		June 5, 2013	
Planning process - establish an identity for the town: "What is Arlington"?	24	Creatively look for parking solutions (go vertical or underground)	15	Underdeveloped parcels on Mass. Ave.	41
Bring "T" to Arlington	16	More public art and festivals	11	More corporate headquarters = improved tax base	36
Planning process: get fiscal house in order and improve fiscal control	12	Strengthen & support local businesses & workspaces	11	Beautification projects (citizen and business involvement)	26
Capitalize on history and tourism	9	Community/neighbor centers	8	Farmer's Market expansion	20
Mixed use	7	Emphasize commercial developments over residential	7	Tourism & history of Arlington	20
Increase frequency of public transportation	7	Increase affordable housing for veterans and town employees	5	Take advantage of transit diversity (hubway, car share)	20
		Increase use of public space for events	5	Raise revenue through overnight parking	17

### 4. Potential Threats to Arlington's Future

June 1, 2013		June 3, 2013		June 5, 2013	
Ongoing structural deficit is unsustainable	33	Over-dependence on residential tax base	21	Continued residential development to detriment of commerce (in areas suitable for commerce on Mass. Ave)	27
Gridlock of roads	23	Lack of subway	9	Climate adaptation - no plan	23
Lack of regional planning	16	Economic adversity	8	Lack of parking (garage?)	16
Convolved decision process	11	Escalating taxes reduce community stability	8	Loss of tree canopy	14

June 1, 2013		June 3, 2013		June 5, 2013	
Global warming/environmental changes	11	Teardowns threaten character	8	Lack of school capacity & uncertainty of projections	14
Major route for tanker trucks, Rt. 60, Warren Street	8	Conversion to 2-families to condos	7	Increased flooding	12
		Lack of planning coordination w/ Cambridge (esp. traffic)	6	Deferred school maintenance	12

### C. Survey Monkey

Around the same time that RKG conducted interviews at Town Hall, we began to track responses to an online survey as well. As you may remember, a two-question survey was posted on Survey Monkey to find out if respondents substantially agreed or disagreed with the ideas people embraced at the World Café event last October. Each question contains the top ten priorities from the World Café. Below is a quick summary of the rankings on Survey Monkey (we have delivered the entire file, with open-ended comments, to PCD). Overall, the responses are very similar to the comments residents made at interviews or during the community meetings.

What do you value about Arlington?		
Answer Options	Rating Average	Response Count
It's walkable	4.40	936
Good schools	4.10	932
Convenient location	4.62	941
Easy to participate in government	3.51	934
Good public transit	4.09	940
Sense of community	4.04	937
Perfect mix of urban, suburban, and small town	4.12	932
Family friendly	4.22	933
Minuteman Bikepath	4.39	936
Good open space and recreation	4.09	936
Demographic diversity	3.56	931
Historic character	3.91	939

<b>What do you want to encourage in Arlington in the future?</b>		
Answer Options	Rating Average	Response Count
More community centers and gathering spaces	3.57	921
Demographic diversity	3.63	925
New businesses: for employment growth	3.96	929
New businesses: for shopping	3.94	923
New businesses: for diversifying the tax base	4.16	930
More parking in commercial centers	3.46	931
More open space	3.81	911
Better maintenance of existing open space	4.02	927
More night life	3.34	928
More affordable housing	3.26	919
More cultural opportunities	3.58	922
Reduce our carbon footprint	3.73	920
More recreational opportunities	3.63	922

#### **D. For Discussion @ MPAC Meeting**

- Do you see any patterns or over-arching themes in responses at the interviews and/or community meetings? For example:
  - Financial concerns, e.g., the size and composition of Arlington's tax base and the high cost of residential tax bills
  - Quality and character of the public realm, e.g., the condition of sidewalks, streetscapes, parking
  - Environmental hazards
- If you had to write one goal for each element of the Master Plan, how would your work be informed by the results of the public process so far? What more would you need (or want) to know about the community's sense of self and hopes for the future?
- For those who attended any of the community meetings, do you think the participants were fairly representative of the Town as a whole? Who was missing?
- Would the qualities people appreciate in Arlington and the issues that concern them be much different if you consulted with groups who may have been unrepresented at the community meetings or during the interview process? If the answer is "yes," what do you think the MPAC can do to reach those groups?



## **II. NEXT STEPS**

As discussed at the last MPAC meeting, for the next few months, RKG will be focusing on the first major “product” in our contract with the Town: the Draft Findings Report, which is due in October. The Draft Findings Report needs to include a proposed Master Plan vision and goals from the MPAC, and content that we call baseline assessments (or existing conditions summaries) for each element of the plan. Together with our subcontractors, we must turn our attention to the technical work that’s required for the baseline assessments while the MPAC develops what will become a guiding framework for the plan.

### **A. Organizing for the Draft Findings Report**

#### **1. Master Plan Vision and Goals**

Master plan committees often create subcommittees or working groups to develop master plan goals. The same groups function as “experts” to assist with reviewing drafts and helping to shape the master plan working papers (draft elements) that will roll out over several months following release of the Draft Findings Report. Subcommittees are not required, but they can help a master plan committee work more efficiently. They also create ways for other residents to have a role in developing the master plan without having the responsibilities and burdens of the master plan committee. We can go over some other models on Tuesday night, but the most important (crucial!) task for the MPAC at this point is to decide *how to organize* for the vision and goals process and *set a schedule* for the work.

To deliver the Draft Findings Report by mid-October, we will need the draft vision and goals from the MPAC by mid-September. This will give us a chance to review the drafts, provide feedback, offer editorial assistance as needed, and keep the project as a whole on track. We can offer the following help while the MPAC and/or subcommittees work on the vision and goals over the summer:

- We can provide a “template” that illustrates what a goal should look like. (Sometimes committees strive for a level of detail that is more appropriate for objectives than goals, and other times they write such broad goals that measuring progress later is just about impossible.)
- If the MPAC decides to reach out to more people in the community – such as groups that may not have been represented well during the recent public participation program – we can provide interview or meeting protocols for the committee’s use. While we will not be able to staff additional public meetings with consultants from our team, we can offer technical assistance and advice and would be pleased to do so.

Ideally, there should be three to five goals for each element of the master plan. There is no magic to three or five, however. We have seen a few nicely developed master plans with one goal for each element, but in general we do not recommend it.

## **B. Area Assessments**

One of our responsibilities for the Land Use Working Paper (due December 2013) is a set of area assessments that examines possibilities for a parcel, or a few contiguous parcels, that may be ripe for development/redevelopment. The baselines in the Draft Findings Report should include an existing conditions summary of the parcel(s) that will become area assessment candidates for the draft master plan. As a result, the study parcel(s) need to be identified soon. We would like input from PCD staff and the MPAC about parcel(s) preferred for this kind of review. We can discuss this on Tuesday, considering (among other things) the maps produced by the community meeting breakout groups. Staff and MPAC members should be thinking about properties they want us to evaluate.

## **C. RKG Team Division of Responsibilities**

We have been asked to clarify the roles and responsibilities of consultants on our team. I recognize that my change in employment has probably created some confusion. Perhaps the following will make it easier for Town staff and MPAC members to understand how we have organized to complete Arlington's master plan.

- **RKG** is the lead consultant. I am project manager, which means I am responsible for directing the project, coordinating the work of our subcontractors, and representing the team in communications with the Town. The principal in charge is Craig Seymour, President and Managing Partner of RKG Associates.

RKG has primary responsibility for the Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, and Public Facilities elements of the master plan.

- **Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc. (HSH)**, has primary responsibility for the circulation & transportation element of the master plan. Since HSH does quite a bit of public involvement work, they are the "backup" consultant for public participation in Arlington, e.g., assisting with conducting public meetings, as Keri Pyke did at the community meeting on June 4. In addition, HSH is providing intensive support for the Land Use element.
- **David Gamble, Gamble Associates**, is working with us on the Land Use and Open Space elements of the plan. He will play a significant role in identifying redevelopment/reuse ideas for the area assessment parcels and making public realm recommendations. RKG, HSH, and Gamble are all involved in the Land Use element, with RKG ultimately responsible for it.
- **Community Opportunities Group, Inc. (COG)**, will provide significant support for the baseline assessments and take primary responsibility for the Natural and Cultural Resources and Open Space-Recreation elements of the plan.
- **Ezra Glenn** is our public participation and public process consultant. He will attend MPAC meetings with me from time to time, provide guidance and support to RKG's

other team members, and be available for public workshop-style meetings or public hearings that may occur later in the master plan development cycle. Ezra may also be asked to assist with some quantitative analysis for the master plan elements.

As we work on the baseline assessments, staff from any of the above firms may contact Town staff to obtain local data or other information.



## **Attachment A**

### **Friday, May 17, 2013**

Interviewer: Judi Barrett, RKG

- Stuart Belden
- John Fanciullo
- John Leone
- Brucie Moulton
- Diane Mahon, Selectman

### **Monday, May 20, 2013**

Interviewer: Nathaniel Cabral-Curtis, Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc.

- Steve Makowka
- Christine Carney
- Charles Foscett
- Richard Fraiman
- Ed Starr
- Phil Chaves
- Jenn Tripp

### **Tuesday, May 21, 2013**

Interviewers: Peter D. Sanborn, Courtney Synowiec, Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

- Scott Smith
- David White
- Jane Howard
- Leland Stein
- Alan Jones
- Peter Howard
- Sam D'Agostino

### **Wednesday, May 22, 2013**

Interviewer: Patti Kelleher, Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

- Clarissa Rowe
  - Donna Janis
  - Richard Keshian
  - Kathleen Darcy
  - Jill Mirak
  - Bob Mirak
  - Bob Bowes
  - Jan Whitted
  - Christine Scypinski
  - Bruce Fitzgerald
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**Wednesday, May 29, 2013**

Interviewer: Patti Kelleher, Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

Steve Biagioni

Adam Auster

JoAnn Robinson

John Belskis

John Worden

Barbara Popolow

Brian Rehrig

Danuta Forbes

Mike Byrne

Bernard Wadsworth

Chris Doyle

Lynn Bishop

Mary Deyst

Eric Helmuth

Tom Zaloum

Carolyn Boettner

Chuck Pappas

Interviewer: David Gamble, Gamble Associates

- Steve Byrne, Selectman
- Kevin Greeley, Selectman
- Maria Romano
- Mike Cayer
- Joe Curro, Selectman
- Dan Dunn, Chair, Board of Selectmen